

**Alabama Rural
Development
Office**



**Ron Sparks,
Director**

**Black Belt
Commission
Executive Director,
Emily Law
(334) 353-5185
emily.law@adeca.
alabama.gov**

**Co-Chairs:
Margaret Bentley
Senator Billy Beasley
Mayor Sheldon Day
Beatrice M. Forniss**

**Center for Commerce
Suite 320
P.O. Box 5690
Montgomery, AL
36103**

Black Belt Commission

VOLUME IV, ISSUE I

JUNE 2013

DAVITA DIALYSIS CENTER OPENS IN PERRY COUNTY

Perry County and the entire Black Belt region have high rates of hypertension, diabetes, and obesity that increase the risk for kidney failure. Until recently, Perry County had not had a dialysis center, and dialysis patients from Perry County were forced to drive 60-100 miles roundtrip for treatment three or four times per week. On January 18, 2013, this all changed when Davita Dialysis opened the doors to the Perry County Dialysis Center. Governor Robert Bentley was on hand to mark the occasion and cut the ribbon on the new facility. The Governor was in awe of what the small town of Marion, Alabama had accomplished. What began as a local movement designed to help those who need dialysis became a twelve-year quest.

In 2001, as more and more dialysis patients from Perry County emphasized the need for a dialysis center within the county, their local Healthcare Task Force began to prioritize this issue and Frances Ford, Perry County Health Coordinator, made it a top goal to help bring dialysis to Perry County. Dr. Mickey Trimm, Associate Professor of Healthcare said, "This would not be here today without Frances (Ford). She spearheaded this whole project."

After research, they found that Perry County could not legally open a dialysis center because a state regulation from 1975 that prevented dialysis facilities from operating unless they were within 10 miles of a hospital. Currently, there is not a hospital in Perry County.

In 2004, the Black Belt Commission was formed, and the Health Committee worked closely with the health leaders in Perry County and this dialysis issue became a top priority for the Health Committee. Working together, they found strong interest from private dialysis companies in opening a dialysis center in Perry County if the state regulation the attention of State Health Officer, Dr. Donald Williamson, and he said he believed the regulation was outdated. He said the regulation made sense in 1975 when there were many rural hospitals in Alabama and when dialysis was more risky, but that as the treatment became more refined and routine, the likelihood of any complications decreased and now the transportation issue far outweighed the original need for the regulation. The 10 mile rule was eliminated in August 2006 by the ADPH board and a news conference was held announcing this decision.

Local health leaders and local elected officials have since worked with the administrations of the current and previous Alabama Governors, State Senators, and U.S. Representatives to find any way to attract a dialysis company to the county. The Rural Development Office, under the leadership of Commissioner Ron Sparks, and the Black Belt Commission, under the leadership of Emily Law, have kept this issue a top priority



Ron Sparks, Rural Development Office Director joins Governor Bentley and local elected officials at the opening of the Davita Dialysis Clinic in Perry County, Alabama.

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(DaVita Dialysis Center Opens *continued from page 1*)

during Governor Bentley's tenure.

DaVita Dialysis stepped forward to solve this issue for Perry County residents. In addition to helping dialysis patients from Perry County, this will also benefit patients from Bibb and Hale Counties that do not have a dialysis facility. There are approximately 100 dialysis patients living in these three counties. The new center will drastically improve the quality of life for these patients and illustrates that many rural issues can be solved with the dedication and hard work of a collaborative effort from the local, regional, and state levels.

The Perry County Commission voted to dedicate the new dialysis center building in memory of Mr. Homer A. LeCroy and Mr. Hoover Kynard. Both were dialysis patients who lived in Perry County. Mr. LeCroy is the grandfather of Chad Nichols. Chad serves as a Health Committee Co-Chair for the Black Belt Commission and worked closely on this issue for the last 8 years. This issue became a passion of his after seeing what his grandfather endured in trying to get to dialysis and the serious car accident he was in traveling long distances to dialysis. Mr. Hoover Kynard was one of the dialysis patients who first came to Perry County leaders over 10 years ago to ask them to recruit a dialysis company to open a Perry County clinic. Mr. Kynard helped to make this a top priority at the local level.

Others in attendance, along with the Governor, were Senator Hank Sanders, Senator Bobby Singleton, Marion Mayor Anthony Long, Ron Sparks of the Rural Development Office, several members of the Black Belt Commission, Perry County Commission Chair, Ron Miller, and Commissioners, Dr. David Potts, President of Judson College, the Perry County Hospital Board and the family of H. A. LeCroy and Rosie Kynard, widow of Hoover Kynard. A plaque will be hung in their memory in the lobby of the facility. Representatives from Congresswoman Sewell's office, Carolyn Powell and Samuel Greene, were present, along with the Executive Director of the Marion Chamber of Commerce, John Martin.



KidCheckPlus™ gets New Vehicle

A Sight Savers America Program

On April 29, 2013, five Honda manufacturing plant employees met the KidCheck Plus staff at Glen Iris Elementary School to present the new 2012 Honda Ridgeline Truck to KidCheck Plus. "The donation of the 2012 Honda Ridgeline will greatly benefit our KidCheck Plus team as they travel throughout the state to provide a head-to-toe health assessments. A KidCheck Plus health screening may be the only medical evaluation some children in our community have all year," according to Chad Nichols, Vice President of KidCheck Plus.



PERRY COUNTY NURSING HOME SCHEDULES RIBBON-CUTTING

On the same day as the ribbon-cutting for the Perry County Dialysis Center, Rural Development Office Director Ron Sparks was asked to assist in a ribbon-cutting for the Perry County Nursing Home located next door to the dialysis center at 505 Lafayette Street. After a much publicized ribbon-cutting for DaVita Dialysis, many of the Black Belt Commission members moved next door to assist with the opening of the Outpatient Rehab Facility that had just opened in the same building as the home.

Administrator, Sharon Phillips, stated the building had previously been a health care facility and met the criteria for the rehab center, so it was a natural fit. "We are excited we could officially open the same day of the dialysis center in order to publicize this news."

A visit with Chad's grandfather who is ninety-five was a highlight for the group. Chad's father, mother, and uncle were on hand to attend the ribbon-cutting of the Dialysis Center and the ribbon-cutting for the Outpatient Rehab Center.



Mr. Bruce Nichols with Ron Sparks



Perry County Nursing Home Rehabilitation Center Ribbon cutting.

DAVITA DIALYSIS AND THE PERRY COUNTY COMMISSION DEDICATES PLAQUE

Davita Dialysis and the Perry County Commission unveiled a plaque dedicating the Center in memory of Mr. Hoover Kynard and Mr. Homer LeCroy, Tuesday, May 21st. Both were dialysis patients who lived in Perry County and sparked the initial effort in getting a dialysis center located in Perry County. Mr. Kynard was the grandfather of Chad Nichols, Health Committee Co-Chair. Portraits of the two will hang in the conference room of the center.



EDUCATION COMMITTEE WORKS ON SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT SUMMIT

The Education Committee worked with Lowndes, Butler, and Dallas County Public Schools to present the 2013 School Improvement Summit on June 3 and 4 at the Renaissance Hotel in Montgomery. Speakers included Sherrill Parris, Deputy State Superintendent; Cedric Sparks, Executive Director of Youth Services for the City of Birmingham; Shanthia Washington, Educational Administrator with the Alabama State Department of Education; Charles Nash, Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs for the University of Alabama System; and Hank Sanders, Alabama State Senator for District 23. Scores of other presenters held sessions on topics such as preventing bullying, improving math instruction, using technology to support common core standards, increasing high school literacy, motivating and retaining volunteers, and improving ACT writing, among others.

Over 275 educators participated in this year's conference. Henry Campbell, band director at Central High School in Lowndes County and an educator for more than twenty-four years, said he enjoyed meeting with the different counties to share ideas. "I loved hearing about new concepts and what others are doing in their classrooms," Campbell said. Belinda Cook, a fourth grade math and science teacher at Greenville Elementary in Butler County, said she was most impressed with the variety of sessions available. "I particularly enjoyed the 'Math That Matters' session," Cook said. "The teachers who led it knew the common core well and directed the session toward that, using hands-on activities."

Daniel Boyd, Superintendent of Lowndes County Schools, said he is excited to see the Black Belt counties moving forward in education. "The outstanding attendance at this conference shows how committed Black Belt educators are about improving education," he said.



Left to right Charles Nash, Vice Chancellor of The University of Alabama System, Dr. Daniel Boyd, Superintendent Lowndes County Schools, Emily Law, Executive Director Black Belt Commission, and Darren Douthitt, Superintendent of Butler County Schools.



NEW PROGRAM LETS YOU CONFERENCE CALL DOCTORS

By Alabama News Network

Story Created: May 14, 2013 at 5:50 PM CDT

Story Updated: May 15, 2013 at 12:09 AM CDT

The tools look like anything you'd find in a regular doctors office, but they're designed to help someone hundreds of miles away give you a check up. You can even talk with a hospital in South Georgia.

Those tools let you look at a patient's throat and a high resolution picture of their skin.

Director of Rural Development Ron Sparks says the program will change healthcare in small towns.

"That's the way it's moving into the future. It's allowing somebody in rural Alabama, possibly we can save their life or limit their rehabilitation. That's our goal. Giving people a quality of life so they'll have a better life," said Sparks.

The rehab specialist at Southeast Alabama Medical Center, Cecelia Land, says they've had a lot of success with the program.

"Our hospital is a 420 bed hospital and one of the reasons we did this was we thought we could offer our services here and we felt a lot of our services weren't getting into our community hospitals," said Land.

The Executive Director of Alabama's Telehealth Program, Lloyd Sirmons, said that there are currently 30 sites using the program.

"We've been able to do that in just under a year. So it's been moving very rapidly," said Lloyd Sirmons.

"The whole purpose of telehealth is saving lives. And it's not if it's coming to Alabama, it's when," Sparks said.

Sight Savers America

Provides Free Comprehensive Eye Care to Perry County Children

Sight Savers America is an Alabama-based nonprofit that has coordinated annual eye clinics for children in Alabama's Black Belt since 2004 in order to help address the lack of access to eye care in the region. On April 25, 2013, Sight Savers America's Children's Eye Care Network Department, the UAB Department of Ophthalmology doctors, and Lenscrafters technicians held their most recent eye clinic at the Perry County Health Department in Marion.



Comprehensive vision exams were provided to 80 children who failed prior vision screenings in their schools, head start programs and day care centers. These vision exams were administered by Dr. Ann Marie Arciniegas and two residents from UAB Ophthalmology. Every child that needed eyeglasses was then fitted on-site by

Lenscrafters technicians. All services were provided free of charge.

For many Perry County children, this eye clinic is their only access to comprehensive eye care because the county does not have any ophthalmologists or optometrists. By bringing eye care to Perry County, Sight Savers America is addressing a critical need that is improving the lives of children. Many children receive their first pair of eyeglasses at the clinic. In many cases, these children show dramatic improvement in



school. Often times, parents discover that their child who had been thought to have a learning disability simply had an undetected vision problem that is now being corrected with eyeglasses. Through the work of Sight Savers America and its partners, more children in the Black Belt have attained their best possible vision which is improving their quality of life and equipping them to reach their full potential in school.

Sight Savers America utilizes a unique follow-up eye care protocol to coordinate eye exams, eyeglasses, medications, surgery and other recommended treatment for 30,000 children statewide each year, enabling each child the opportunity to attain his or her best possible vision. The individualized case management and follow-up of this program increases the rate at which children receive eye care after a failed screening from 35% to 80%. Sight Savers America removes barriers to academic and social success for children in need, something as simple as a pair of glasses can ensure that a child does not become part of the 20% of children whose neglected vision needs are a contributing factor in their dropping out of schools by age 16. For more information on Sight Savers America, please visit www.sightsaversamerica.org.



BLACK BELT TEEN ENTREPRENEURS? JUST SAY “Y.E.S.”!

Not every teenager is the boss of her own dad, but not every teenager is Leanna Archer of Long Island, New York.

Leanna, CEO of Leanna’s Hair, Inc., is the seventeen-year-old business phenom who came to Livingston on April 30 to deliver the keynote address at the third annual Youth Entrepreneurial Success (YES) summit, hosted by the University of West Alabama’s Small Business Development Center and the Black Belt Commission’s Small Business Development Committee. Leanna addressed over 250 Black Belt high school students and shared with them her amazing success story.

“When something keeps you awake at night because you can’t stop thinking about it, you’ve got something,” Leanna told the audience of high school juniors and seniors. “You need to do something with that idea. And don’t let anything stop you.”

Leanna’s big idea came to her when she was only nine years old. Her Haitian grandmother had a special recipe for hair dressing that she made from all-natural Haitian oils. Leanna and her entire family used the recipe and consistently received compliments on their shiny, healthy hair. “Everywhere we went, people would ask what we used on our hair and where they could get some,” Leanna explained. “We told them we made it ourselves, and they’d give us money and say, ‘I need some of that. Just make it happen.’”

Leanna suggested to her parents that they start a business to make and sell the hair dressing, but they were too busy. “They both had full-time jobs,” Leanna said. “They told me, ‘You can start the business maybe when you get to college.’”

But as a perfect example of how our free market economy works, Leanna got a crash course in the principle of supply and demand. “People wanted the product so much and kept after me about making it for them,” she said. Finally, at the age of nine, Leanna launched Leanna’s Hair, Inc. The business has grown into a full line of products, all available online, and Leanna’s company nets over six figures a year. Leanna has received accolades from the NAACP, is the youngest person in history to ring the bell to open trading at the stock market, and has appeared on THE WENDY WILLIAMS SHOW, BET, and in the pages of GIRLS’ LIFE and other magazines. Her dad, Gregory Archer, eventually quit his job and now works for his daughter. “I’ve had to fire him a couple of times, but I always hire him back,” Leanna joked.



Donald Mills, chairman of the Black Belt Commission’s Small Business Development Committee and Director of the University of West Alabama’s Small Business Development Center, told the youth in attendance that being their own boss was something to aspire to, especially if it meant they could be the boss of their own dad, like Leanna is. “She tells HIM what to do!” Mills told the crowd to enthusiastic cheers. “If you’re the boss, you can hire and fire whomever you want. You get to make the decisions. You could make a better life for your entire family and for generations to come.”

Leanna Archer and Donald Mills shown with UWA staff.

BEATRICE M. FORNISS **Receives**

UWA Center for Economic Services Director's AWARD

Beatrice M. Forniss, fondly known as “Bea,” was recently selected as the recipient of the annual University of West Alabama Center for Business and Economic Services Director’s Award for outstanding leadership. Mr. Billy McFarland, the Director for the Center for Business and Economic Services, presented the award to Mrs. Forniss Tuesday, May 21, 2013, at her office at ADECA located in the Center for Commerce building in Montgomery, Alabama.

She joins the ranks of other recipients of this award that include U. S. Congresswoman Terri Sewell and Delta Regional Authority Federal Co-Chairman, Chris Masingill. The purpose of this award is to recognize outstanding leadership in Alabama’s Black Belt region and for a lifetime of service to the region and to our state. “Bea” was presented with a beautiful plaque and letter of recognition from Dr. Richard D. Holland, President of the University of West Alabama.



NEWEST CO-CHAIR WINS ASU TULLIBODY AWARD

The Dunn-Oliver Acadome was filled with faculty, staff, alumni, students and friends who gathered on February 8 to celebrate ASU's 113th Founders' Day. Donald V. Watkins, son of former ASU President Levi Watkins, delivered the keynote address and praised the University for overcoming obstacles in the past. He also encouraged current leaders to stay united in the future so that the University can progress to the next level.

Watkins, who is an attorney, banker and international entrepreneur, reminded the audience of the University's rich history and the many battles fought for equality. He applauded the University for its competitiveness on a global level and for its strong financial position. On a personal level, Watkins said it was very emotional and satisfying to be able to deliver the keynote address at the Convocation.

Following Watkins' address, ASU presented the annual Spirit of Marion and Spirit of Tullibody Awards, honoring two distinguished alumni. The 2013 Spirit of Tullibody Award recipient is alumna Beatrice "Bea" Forniss. The 1972 graduate of Alabama State University spent more than 20 years as a classroom teacher in Montgomery and Lowndes Counties. After retiring from teaching, she joined the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA), where she now is the division chief, supervising more than 40 employees. Forniss also heads the Renewal Communities Program, the Enterprise Zone Community Program, the Delta Regional Authority Program, the Minority Business Program, Housing Opportunities for people with AIDS, and she provides technical assistance for community and economic development projects in distressed areas.

She recently was appointed by Alabama Governor Robert Bentley to serve as one of four co-chairs of the Black Belt Commission. Forniss is an active member of First Congregational Christian Church and is involved with numerous civic organizations, including the Alabama State Employees Association, the Civil Justice Foundation, Leadership Montgomery and Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc. She has served and currently serves on numerous boards, including the Montgomery Area United Way, the Montgomery Symphony and the United Church of Christ. She also volunteers at the Tutwiler Prison for Women.

She has received several awards in recognition of her service to others, including the Bishop Barron State Employee Public Service Award, the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Legacy Community Award and the Commerce Young Woman Leadership Award. Forniss currently serves as the president of the ASU National Alumni Association and is chairwoman of the ASU Foundation's Board of Directors.

This award recognizes individuals whose professional efforts have created innovation, positive change or notable advancement in an industry, environment or concept. Nominees must demonstrate great vision, honorable citizenship and success in the face of challenge. The designee had to meet the criteria of being an Alabama State University graduate, have a record of noteworthy community outreach efforts and demonstrate a positive impact on the community. Bea Forniss fit all the criteria.

BLACK BELT REGION KICKS OFF 2ND WORLD'S WIDEST YARD SALE

Although an in-depth evaluation of this year's sale has not been completed, the Office of Rural Development and the Black Belt Commission's Marketing and Tourism Committee view this year's sale a huge success. The U. S. 80 corridor, as well as major arteries in the Black Belt region of Alabama were featured during the three days of bargain hunting and intriguing sides trips May 31st –June 2nd, 2013.

This year's committee focused on advertisement and publicity of the sale and it was evident word got out due to the amount of attention the office received, as well as the increased participation. Numerous articles were written throughout the region and all major TV stations contacted the office for interviews.

Ron Sparks, Director of the Rural Development Office, as well as committee chair, Pam Swanner and Emily Law, Executive Director Black Belt Commission, traveled throughout the region during the three-day sale to gather comments at different vendor location. The first day of the sale, Emily Law stopped in Camden and spoke with Sulynn Cresswell of Black Belt Treasures. She was excited about sales at her booth and stated, "Any time you get people out of their homes and into the heart of the city to see what's going on, it's a good day. Everyone's excited!" Sheryl Threadgill-Matthews, Director of the Wilcox Area chamber of Commerce, reported, "The yard sale was a wonderful experience. Everyone sold something and the fellowship was fantastic."

New participating locations included Camden, Troy, Prattville, Boligee, Greensboro and Monroeville. Ron Sparks introduced the idea as a project for the Alabama Black Belt Commission's Marketing and Tourism Committee in 2012 and the committee decided to expand the locations for this year's sale.

Also included on the website and brochure were suggested locations to 'Eat, Play, Shop, Stay.' "This project is an entertaining way to showcase the region in a positive light and we expect this event to get bigger each year, just as the 'Longest Yard Sale' has," announced Director Sparks.



Angie's Auction, Selma, AL



2ND WORLD'S WIDEST YARD SALE



Selma Flea Market



Camden, AL



Angie's Auction, Selma



Eastbrook Flea Market



Angie's Auction, Selma



ASU-WVAS-Angie's Auction



Will Hill Store-Lowndesboro, AL



Angie's Auction, Selma

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P. O. Box 5690

Montgomery, AL 36103